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Socius, Civis, et Alii

### The old collections of chess endgames

A specific section on the openings became a standard part of chess didactics only after the introduction of the modern rules, with long moves for bishops and queens. On the other hand, an extended treatment of the middle-game is practically a conquest of the first decades of the 20th century. Therefore, only chess endgames were dealt with in the first works of chess theory.

The first book of chess technique printed was a collection of endgames, selected by Vicent; just one hundred of them formed the whole contents of this book of 1495, no specimen of which is known to have survived. The following chess books printed met with a greater success and sometimes, as that of Damiano, were published in many editions. In general, they were not exclusively devoted to chess endgames, but they did usually contain a significant part corresponding to them.

Before the introduction of printing, many handwritten books were devoted to chess endgames. When examining their contents, we have first to reflect on a few essential topics, known to every chess historian; in particular, we must pay attention to some fundamental differences with respect to our times.

### Partiti: neither endgames nor problems

Usually, the chess compositions of the old collections of *partiti* were neither our endgames nor our problems. In other words, most of these endings - as I will systematically name them in the following - were neither examples selected for the elementary teaching of theoretical endgames, as it is often done now, nor the results of compositional art, as occurs for our problems and studies. Usually they were like puzzles to solve, or situations worth of a wager: was or was not possible to accomplish the task in the given number of moves and under the stated conditions.

The technical name of *partito* had the meaning of a free choice offered between the two sides of a chess ending - to be played under given conditions - both of which at first sight were showing some evidence for a possible winning path. Obviously, a player could win